

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 HA-05 AID-05
TRSE-00 OMB-01 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
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R 031027Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6964
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1155

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UNRWA, LE
SUBJECT: REMARKS OF UNRWA COMMISSIONER GENERAL

REF: TEL AVIV 2471

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. IN CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR ON
FEBRUARY 28, UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL MCELHINEY SAID THAT:
(1) THE ISRAELIS SEEMED TO BE CRITICIZING AND PRAISING UNRWA
AT THE SAME TIME: (2) CONSTRUCTION OF BISSARIYAH CAMP WOULD NOT
BE COMPLETED UNTIL AROUND THE END OF 1979, (3) NOT MANY PAL-
ESTINIANS WOULD RETURN TO THE WEST BANK, EVEN IF AN INDEPENDENT
STATE WERE FORMED THERE, AND (4) HE SAW LITTLE POSSIBILITY OF
POLITICAL PROGRESS IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY

2. UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL THOMAS MCELHINEY CALLED ON AMB-
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ASSADOR FEBRUARY 28 FOR A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF UNRWA AFFAIRS.
AMBASSADOR LED OFF BY ASKING FOR HIS REACTION TO REPORT (REFTEL)
THAT ISRAEL HAD A GENERALLY NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS UNRWA.

3. UNRWA RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. IN REPLY, MCELHINEY SAID ISRAELIS
SEEMED TO BE TALKING OUT OF BOTH SIDES OF THEIR MOUTHS. FOREIGN
MINISTER OFFICIALS IN JERUSALEM HAD REPEATEDLY TOLD HIM THAT THEY

VIEWS RECENT UNRWA ACTIVITIES FAVORABLY. AT THE UNITED NATIONS IN NEW YORK, ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVES GENERALLY SUPPORTED PRO-UNRWA RESOLUTIONS, AND HAD EXPLAINED ON ONE OCCASION THAT THEY CRITICIZED UNRWA IN THE SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE ONLY TO AVOID EMBARRASSING UNRWA BY TOO CLOSE AN ASSOCIATION WITH THE ISRAELI POSITION. UNRWA HAD SOME PROBLEMS WITH THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN GAZA, BUT GENERALLY WORKED WELL WITH ISRAELI OFFICIALS ON THE WEST BANK. MCELHINEY WONDERED WHETHER ISRAELI "NEGATIVE NEWS" (REPORTED REFTEL) WERE A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE BECAUSE ISRAEL OPPOSED THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE ORGANIZATION, OR WHETHER ISRAEL OBJECTED TO SOME SPECIFIC ACTIONS UNRWA HAD TAKEN. HE NOTED THAT ISRAELI MILITARY ESCORTS FOR VISITING VIP'S WERE KNOWN TO MAKE CRITICAL REMARKS, OFTEN UNFAIRLY, ABOUT UNRWA INSTALLATIONS. HE HAD COMPLAINED TO DIRECTOR OF UN AFFAIRS AT FOREIGN MINISTRY WHO HAD AGREED THIS SHOULD BE STOPPED AND HAD UNDERTAKEN TO DO SO. HE FELT IT CLEAR GOI DID NOT WANT UNRWA TO DISAPPEAR BECAUSE IT DID NOT WANT TO PROVIDE ITS SERVICES.

4. BISSARIYAH CAMP. MCELHINEY SAID PLANS FOR BISSARIYAH CAMP WOULD NOT BE FINISHED UNTIL THIS SUMMER AND CONSTRUCTION WOULD NOT BE FINISHED UNTIL THIS SUMMER AND CONSTRUCTION WOULD NOT BE COMPLETED UNTIL AROUND END OF 1979. (THE CAMP IS INTENDED TO ACCOMMODATE THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES FROM TEL ZATAAR NOW LIVING IN DAMOUR.) TOTAL COST OF THE CAMP WOULD BE \$6 TO \$7 MILLION, BUT ONLY ABOUT \$.5 MILLION HAD BEEN PLEDGED SO FAR, THIS WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM THE LL 10 MILLION SAUDI ARABIA HAD GIVEN TO THE PLO, WHICH HAD TURNED THE MONEY OVER TO THE GOL. IN ADDITION, HOLLAND HAD PLEDGED ABOUT \$450,000, BUT NO OTHER COUNTRIES HAD GIVEN ANY MONEY. UNLESS FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS ARE MADE, THE CAMP WOULD NOT BE COMPLETED SATISFACTORILY.

5. PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON. MCELHINEY ESTIMATED THAT VERY FEW PALESTINIANS WOULD RETURN TO THE WEST BANK FROM LEBANON EVEN IF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE WERE FORMED THERE. MOREOVER, NONE OF THE OTHER ARAB STATES WOULD ACCEPT THE PALESTINIANS NOW IN LEBANON. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REALIZE THAT MOST OF THE PALESTINIANS WERE HERE TO STAY AND PLAN ACCORDINGLY, BUT THE GOL RESOLUTELY REFUSED TO FACE THE FACTS OR EVEN MAKE AN ATTEMPT TO LEARN THEM. MCELHINEY SAID THE MEAN INCOME LEVEL OF PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON WAS PROBABLY A LITTLE HIGHER THAN THE MEAN INCOME LEVEL OF THE GENERAL LEBANESE POPULATION. ABOUT 15 PERCENT OF THE PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON WERE CHRISTIANS AS COMPARED TO ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF THE PALESTINIAN EXPATRIATE POPULATION AS A WHOLE. ABOUT 45 PERCENT OF UNRWA'S PALESTINIAN STAFF IN LEBANON WERE CHRISTIANS.

6. PROSPECTS FOR LEBANON. MCELHINEY WAS VERY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT

THE POSSIBILITY OF POLITICAL PROGRESS IN LEBANON AND FORESAW
AT BEST CONTINUING INSTABILITY. HE HELF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS
WERE LIKELY TO REMAIN THE MOST IMPORTANT MILITARY FORCES IN THE
COUNTRY AND BEYOND THE CONTROL OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. EVEN
IF THE GOVERNMENT SUCCEEDED IN FORMING A NEW ARMY, IT WOULD
NOT BE ABLE TO USE IT EFFECTIVELY. LEBANON HAD AN ARMY BEFORE
THE 1975-76 WAR, BUT COULD NOT DEPLOY IT WHEN MAJOR CONFESSIONAL
INTERESTS WERE INVOLVED. THUS THE ONLY REALISTIC PROSPECT WAS
CONTINUING POLITICAL INSTABILITY. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: IN
COMMON WITH MANY OTHER LOCAL OBSERVERS, MCELHINEY TAKES A
SOMEWHAT DETACHED AND CYNICAL NIEW OF THE LOCAL SITUATION. HE
AGREES, HOWEVER, THAT WE CANNOT STAND BY AND WATCH HIS PRE-
DICTION BE FULFILLED.

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